Job Standardization and Organization-Based Self-Esteem in the Hospitality Industry: A Perspective of Socialization

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ABSTRACT
Exploring the antecedent factors of the self-evaluation values of new employees in an organization is an important issue for practitioners across countries since a novel environment increases the likelihood of their withdrawal from the job. This study approaches the issue from a socialization perspective, with the hypothesis that socialization is critical for newcomers with regard to emotional bonding and attitudinal and behavioral adaptation. The study uses a survey questionnaire to investigate the influence of job standardization on the organization-based self-esteem of newcomer employees in the hospitality field. A total of 186 valid questionnaires were collected from employees at 14 upscale hotels in Taiwan. Regression analysis of the data showed that job standardization is significantly and positively related to organization-based self-esteem. Moreover, the results indicated that job standardization explained a 9.6% additional variance after controlling negative affect. These results support the hypothesis in this study.

Keywords: Socialization, job standardization, organization-based self-esteem, hotel industry
1. INTRODUCTION

Because of the high employee turnover rate in the hospitality industry, hiring and retaining newcomers are important issues for practitioners across countries [Niu, 2010]. New employees entering an organization for the first time typically encounter uncertainties in the novel work surroundings [Allen, 2006]. Because these uncertainties can result in frustration, anxiety, and stress, the retention rate for first-year employees is low [Hsiung and Hsieh, 2003]. The problem is exacerbated by inadequate socialization tactics, which further increase the likelihood that a newcomer will quit [Allen, 2006].

To break the cycle, management researchers have addressed the importance of socialization for newcomers [Chao et al., 1994; Allen and Meyer, 1990; Bauer et al., 2007]. Adequate socialization is the cornerstone of desirable outcomes such as better adjustment, job satisfaction, and higher performance [Yang, 2009; Lee et al., 2011]. Desirable socialization outcomes indicate the effectiveness of socialization tactics or programs in which new hires learn related jargon and skills from other organization members, clarify their job roles, become immersed in organization norms and culture, obtain information about their social network, and decide whether they can connect to the workplace [Chao et al., 1994]. A meta study of socialization demonstrates that higher degrees of effective socialization lead to positive job attitudes such as affective commitment, expected work behaviors, and retention willingness [Bauer et al., 2007].

The literature on socialization has thrived for decades, mostly with fruitful results. Much of the literature has focused on the way that organizations cultivate employees by sharing culture and helping them understand and accept the nature of the organization [Cable, Gino, and Staats 2013] rather than focus on individual-centered interests. To the best of our knowledge, little is known about job-level variables that contribute to personal needs, such as the socio-emotional need arising from self-evaluation of one’s significance, values, and special qualities.
This study aims to fill the research gap by using a socialization perspective to identify the relationship between job standardization and organization-based self-esteem. We choose this approach because self-evaluation of one’s value in the workplace determines employee’s motivation, attitude, and workplace behaviors [Pierce and Gardner, 2004]. Our empirical results may have managerial implications for hoteliers in their efforts to cultivate promising new employees.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This section includes an overview and discussion of socialization theory, job standardization, and organization-based self-esteem.

2.1. Socialization Theory

Socialization theory was developed by Van Maanen [1978] and further elaborated by Van Maanen and Schein [1979]. The theory received a great deal of attention in the field of organizational behavior because it concerns successful adaption by an employee from the point of entrance to employment determinations during the employee’s career [Mitus, 2006]. The application of socialization theory is especially critical in industries characterized by manpower mobility [Van Mannen and Schein, 1979]. Chao and his colleagues [1994] illustrated that socialization is a cognitive process within the individual who strives for a new or specific role in an organization. New hires attempt to make sense of multiple aspects of organizational life and role identities through social interactions [Hess, 1993]. During socialization, new workers learn what behaviors, perspectives, and values are appropriate and which ones are not [Van Mannen and Schein, 1979]. Socialization outcomes vary depending on individual differences, which will have an influence on the thinking processes of new employees as they interpret and impute meanings from their socialization experiences [Chao et al., 1994].

Organizational socialization is a cultural learning process by which newcomers detect signals about the new environment, such as culture, norms,
values, and expected behaviors, as well as practices and procedures that are the cornerstones for successfully developing person-organization fit and function [Hsiung and Hsieh, 2003; Mitus, 2006]. Organizational socialization thus allows newcomers to learn the ropes and to adjust to a specific role in an organization [Chao et al., 1994]. In other words, new employees acquire an array of information about the organization, which may influence their willingness to invest energy and time [Mitus, 2006]. The information learned helps new employees to understand the nature of the organization. With the information, the employee is able to make decisions about whether to form a connection to the organization [Mitus 2006].

Socialization strategies for newcomers have received much attention. For instance, early research argued that institutionalized socialization programs/tactics such as training courses or job standardization out weigh individual treatment in producing desirable outcomes such as organization commitment because the former offers more structured and information-laden experiences to help new hires with situational consistency [Allen and Meyer, 1990]. In addition, role clarification, the mastery of tasks, and social recognition are top socialization priorities to be achieved by newly hired employees [Hsiung and Hsieh, 2003]. In other words, the initial focus of newcomers is mainly on job-related and social domains.

Hsiung and Hsieh [2003] argued that standard operating procedures could benefit newcomers in developing their job role and social identity by shortening the time spent in task-related learning. As long as newcomers are savvy about their jobs, they will find the time to do well on the non-task area of socialization. Hence, job standardization is an important stimulus in the socialization process of newcomers.

Socialization roles for organizational members not only involve role clarification, task mastery, and internal relationship bonding, but also allow newcomers to observe their new workplace and learn how they are viewed by

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organization members. Are the newcomers welcomed by supervisors or colleagues? Are they valued by the company? In sum, socialization is a critical process in which newcomers evaluate their self-worth [Yang, 2008]. The concept of self-evaluation of one’s importance and acceptance in the employing organization is called “organization-based self-esteem” [Zhou and Miao, 2014].

2.2. Job Standardization

Job standardization is a core section of total quality management (TQM) that has received attention because of the globalized mainstream and the competition strategies applied to achieve organizational excellence [Talib and Rahman, 2010]. For instance, job standardization is identified by its functions in maintaining competitive advantages and enhancing service quality [Waldman, 1994; Hsieh, Chou, and Chen, 2002; Talib and Rahman, 2010].

Job standardization specifies the standard operating procedures (SOP) for relevant organization members during all stages of value chains to earn sustainable progress in productivity or service quality [Hsieh, Chou, and Chen, 2002]. When the input and process stages are standardized, the quality of the outputs (services and products) are expected to meet the expectations of the guest, with few variations [Khanfar, 2011].

Consistency in visible and intangible outputs has been shown to be positively associated with customer service quality perceptions [Hsieh and Hsieh, 2003]. Moreover, having a stable quality outcome relies on the degree of job standardization to overcome the heterogeneous nature of service delivery since a high level of standardization allows various employees to accomplish service goals [Hsieh and Hsieh, 2001]. Finally, TQM encourages integration across departments in order to achieve an outstanding performance covering service encounters and supporting services, as well as managerial service [Khanfar, 2011]. In an upscale hotel, it is common to document and store resident guests’ lost-and-found items properly until the guest revisits because of well-designed standard operating procedures in the front desk and housekeeping departments.
Thus, it is clear that the application of job standardization is essential for service industries.

The effect of job standardization is to narrow the gap between the service provider and customers by converting managerial goals into specific service elements in the use of hard and soft technology, which, in turn, decreases service uncertainties and variations [Hsieh, Chou, and Chen, 2002]. Furthermore, job standardization is beneficial for service providers because it not only increases role clarity, task mastery, social acceptance [Hsiung and Hsieh, 2003], job satisfaction [Karatepe, Avcı, and Araslı, 2004], and personal achievement [Hsieh and Hsieh, 2003], but also reduces burnout, role conflicts, and role ambiguity [Hsieh and Hsieh, 2003].

Job standardization might positively relate to role clarity for newcomers. Frontline employees have strategic advantages because of their involvement in delivering service [Karatepe, Avcı, and Araslı, 2004]. The service providers have spinning boundary roles. They not only satisfy customers, but also have an obligation to reach organizational goals [Chu and Murmann, 2006]. Job standardization might help frontline employees play their roles well in satisfying both their customers and their employing company.

Job standardization is regarded as a socialization tool because it integrates the expected rules, procedures, and organizational cultures. Consider, for example, the service slogan of an upscale hotel enterprise, the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company LLC: “We are ladies for serving ladies; gentlemen for serving gentlemen.” The Ritz-Carlton hotel group embeds practices such as using guests’ names, making eye contact, and using gestures into task standardizations to guide new hires in greeting customers with elegance and attention. Job standardizations instruct new employees not only “what to do,” but also “how to do it” in order to meet simultaneously the expectations of customers and the managerial team alike [Hsieh and Hsieh, 2003].
In addition, job standardization might stimulate emotional attachments with a sense of self-efficacy by helping employees to deal with routines and incidents of service delivery or failure recovery. It is argued that job standardization might impede job flexibility to meet the various needs of customers [Karatepe, Avci, and Arasli, 2004], but, in fact, it is helpful in achieving the goal by embedding empowerment practices into the service process. For instance, Wan-Pin Corporation, a leading restaurant chain in Taiwan, has empowered all frontline employees to compensate customers, such as offering a new dish to replace a faulty one and providing all guests at the same table with souvenirs. In sum, job standardization is not meant to be a barrier to employees’ decisions; instead, it could foster their role meaning and capacities in various situations by embedding empowerment elements into the service process.

2.3. Organization-Based Self-Esteem

Lee and Peccei [2007] adopt a socio-emotional perspective by regarding self-esteem as one of the main factors having a positive effect on an individual’s sense of psychological well-being and his or her life meaning. Self-esteem represents an overall self-evaluation based on the extent to which the individual perceives himself or herself as a capable person [Pierce et al., 1989]. In brief, self-esteem reveals that the recognition of one’s self, the appraisal of one’s own importance/worthiness as an individual, is the individual’s personal self-judgment about his or her own values [Lee and Peccei, 2007].

In addition to reflecting what people think of themselves, self-esteem contains an affective element (liking/disliking) — people with high self-esteem like who and what they are [Pelham and Swann, 1989]. Research on career adaption demonstrates that self-esteem serves as an “anxiety-buffer”— those having high self-esteem cope significantly better than those with low self-esteem [Patton, Bartrum, and Creed, 2004].

Given the fact that self-esteem is a multi-faceted phenomenon, domain-specific self-esteem has emerged as a category, and organization-based
conceptualization of self-evaluation has received much attention. Pierce and his colleagues [1989] initially introduced the concept of organization-based self-esteem. Organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) is the degree to which the individual considers himself or herself a capable, important, valuable, respectable, and adequate person as a member of the organization [Pierce and Gardner, 2004]. Researchers apply OBSE instead of general self-esteem measures to investigate behavioral and attitudinal variables in the workplace because the former has better predictive power [Pierce and Gardner, 2004].

Previous research has identified several potential predictors of OBSE. These variables comprise personal traits and work environment. For instance, Bowling and his colleagues [2010] pointed out that dispositional predictors include general self-esteem, self-efficacy and emotional stability, and that situational positive antecedent variables include affective leadership, social and organizational support, and psychology ownership. A negative relationship exists, however, between OBSE and job stress, role ambiguity, and role conflicts. High levels of OBSE contribute to desirable outcomes such as affective commitment, job satisfaction, and proactive behaviors [Pierce and Gardner, 2004]. Thus, exploring a potential antecedent variable for increasing OBSE is encouraged [Scott, Shaw, and Duffy, 2008].

3. HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

This study argues that socialization is a critical process for newcomers’ emotional bonding and for attitudinal and behavioral adaptation to their employing company. This is true because the formation of attitudes and behavioral intentions is based on information collected during socialization [Lee et al., 2011].

Previous research reveals that organizational and job-related factors are positively related to OBSE. For instance, organizational support, self-efficacy, and job characteristics increase OBSE [Pierce and Gardner, 2004]. The study
posits that job standardization might foster newcomers’ OBSE by shaping their self-efficacy on effective job-related skills. Furthermore, job standardization might cultivate new hires’ OBSE while they gain social acceptance by being recognized by colleagues and customers alike as a competent and adequate member.

Job standardization is a meaning-sharing tool [Hsiung and Hsieh, 2003]. Meaning relies on a community of shared understanding in which content is interpreted [Fine, 1995]. People routinely act with a sense of what is right without describing why they do what they do. In other words, people know a lot of things that they cannot explain [Fine, 1995]. This fact complicates the socialization process and makes it a challenge and a hurdle that can be overcome only when individuals describe their activities and expected outcomes to new colleagues [Fine, 1995]. Through job standardization, the shared meanings of the team or personal activities can be understood and transferred to newcomers. They are accepted by their supervisors and coworkers as capable insiders when they reach the expectations embedded in the job standardization [Hsiung and Hsieh, 2003].

Finally, job standardization also helps newcomers to be recognized and accepted by customers. Job standardization serves to consistently maintain high service quality perceptions and customer value creation because it helps to reduce uncertainty and variability [Chen et al., 2009].

An organization is far from being just a function-operation mechanism; it is also a social system [Scott and Davis, 2007]. Hence, organizational socialization content – including politics, work efficiency, people, language, history, organizational values, and goals – helps new hires to be accepted by the organization. Besides helping a newcomer shape a self-evaluation of his or her worthiness in the organization, the process influences his or her attitudes and behaviors toward the organization [Heck, Bedeian, and Day, 2005]. We expect that individuals with a high level of OBSE are likely to enjoy their workplace and
expend more personal resources on organizational goals. This is because the recognition and acceptance experienced in the context of social interaction with supervisors, coworkers, and customers boost their willingness to engage in the workplace.

To test and clarify the relationship between job standardization and organization-based self-esteem, the current study, drawing on previous research, seeks to control a personal trait called negative affect because it is associated with organization-based self-esteem [Royle, 2010]. Our research structure is depicted in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Research Structure for Current Study](image)

4. **QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES**

For our sample, we targeted hotel employees whose length of employment with the hotel ranged from three months to one year. Since employee tenure constrained us to contact targeted frontline employees directly, we counted strongly on managerial support from hotel practitioners. To reach the expected sample size, we contacted supervisors in the human resource management (HRM) departments and frontline sections of the 14 targeted upscale hotels to win their support. With the input and permission of HRM and frontline supervisors, we
designed the survey questionnaire to cover various customer-contact positions. We then mailed 205 questionnaires to the supervisors with whom we had consulted.

To be consistent with previous studies, we designed our questionnaire based on published research with validated content validity. All of the main constructs were evaluated using perceptual self-report measures with well-established psychometric properties. To ensure scale reliability, a pilot test was conducted involving 32 incoming frontline hotel employees. Items whose values for “item-total correlation” fell below 0.35 were discarded, as recommended by Karatepe, Avci, and Arasli [2004]. Tang [2008] also recommended that the reliability assessment of each construct should exceed the minimum criterion of 0.7. The coefficient α of the pilot test in this study exceeded the minimum level of 0.7. The main constructs of the questionnaire contained 19 items, in a five-point Likert-type response format, with options ranging from “1 = strongly disagree” to “5 = strongly agree.” All scales used in the current study, along with sample items of the relevant constructs, are outlined below.

**Job Standardization.** We used a four-item adaptation of a scale developed by Hsieh and Hsieh [2001] to assess the extent to which employees follow standard operating procedures to perform their jobs. Sample items included:

“The there are no standard operating procedures in this company.”

“We are to follow strict operating procedures at all times.”

“Whatever situation arises, we have procedures to follow in dealing with it.”

“Our company effectively uses automation to achieve consistency in serving people.”

**Organization-Based Self-Esteem.** Organization-based self-esteem was assessed by adapting five items from the OBSE measure designed by Pierce and his colleagues [1989]. Pierce and Gardner [2004] state that a more parsimonious OBSE instrument might be a more viable option since consistently
high reliability values have been obtained so far. Previous researchers investigating different racial participants – such as Scott et al. [2008], Chattopadhyay [2003], and Lee and Peccei [2007] – had also used a shortened version of the instrument without any obvious problem. For our questionnaire, therefore, participants were asked to respond to sample questions such as:

“I am important around here.”
“I am valuable around here.”

Demographics. Participants answered four questions regarding gender, age, job position, and employing hotel.

Control Variables. Previous research showed that negative affect (NA) is a significant predictor of organization-based self-esteem [Royle, 2010]. To clarify the relationship between job standardization and organization-based self-esteem, we included, as a control variable, 10 items of NA measure developed by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen [1988].

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 186 valid questionnaires from 14 upscale hotels were returned. With regard to demographics, 76.4% of respondents were female, and the majority were young, with ages ranging between 20 and 25. The participants came mainly from frontline sections. For instance, 49.1% were from the food and beverage department, and 45.2% served in the room division, which includes the front office and housekeeping departments.

We used three strategies to analyze the data. First, we used reliability analysis and descriptive statistics to show means and standard deviance (SD) of each construct. Second, we displayed correlation analysis, and, third, we used regression analysis to test hypotheses. With regard to reliability analysis (Table 1), the results of coefficient alpha indicated that each measured variable exceeded the minimum limit (0.7). The coefficient alpha ranged from 0.742 to 0.886.
Table 1

Reliability Analysis and Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Coefficient Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Job standardization (JS)</td>
<td>3.454</td>
<td>0.596</td>
<td>0.742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Organization-based self-esteem (OBSE)</td>
<td>3.263</td>
<td>0.623</td>
<td>0.886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Negative affect (NA)</td>
<td>2.300</td>
<td>0.723</td>
<td>0.812</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to the correlation between job standardization and organization-based self-esteem (Table 2), Pearson analysis showed that organization-based self-esteem had a significantly positive relationship with job standardization ($r = 0.371$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the primary assumption was supported.

Table 2

Correlation Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pearson Analysis</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. JS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. OBSE</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.371***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. NA</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.177*</td>
<td>-0.382***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

With regard to the relationship magnitude between job standardization (JS) and organization-based self-esteem (OBSE), we applied regression analysis. To clarify the effect size of JS on OBSE, we took a control variable into account, using two steps. First, we entered the control variable only, and then added JS into the regression equation. As shown in Table 3, the results indicate that JS was a positive and significant explanatory variable to OBSE ($\beta = 0.320$, $p < 0.001$), with 9.6% of additional variance.
Our findings verify that a positive relationship exists between job standardization and organization-based self-esteem. Results of regression affirm our assumption that higher degrees of job standardization among newcomers lead to more self-evaluation of their importance in the employing hotel.

Regarding the contribution of the study, we extend an underestimated domain of socialization effects. Previous studies of socialization outcomes mainly focus on increasing organizational affectivity, such as interpersonal relationships, job motivation, organizational behaviors, and organizational commitment [Yang, 2009]. Cable and his colleagues [2013] encourage further research to enrich socialization theory by exploring individual-centered outcomes such as developing personal pride and values. The current study is in response to their call to verify socialization tactics and individual-perceived self-worth in the workplace. Our study identifies the role of job standardization to provide a
consistent message that increases self-efficacy and develops a sense of control and values.

There are two important managerial implications. First, job standardization should include modifications proposed by frontline employees since they are well positioned to observe feedback/reactions from customers [Karatepe, Avci, and Arasli, 2004]. Because of the boundary spinning roles of frontline employees, requirements from clients and the managerial team might be confronted on occasion; hence, remedies suggested by frontline service providers are helpful in making customer-oriented policies and procedures that retain customer loyalty in a competitive environment. Additionally, inviting service-encounter employees to discuss standardized operating procedures also increases their self-esteem in the workplace because they are being given a higher degree of involvement in decision making [Bowling et al., 2010].

Second, nurturing a sense of competence and confidence is critical for newcomer socialization; hence, social feedback from experienced members is encouraged in order to boost the self-efficacy of new hires [Allen, 2006] and their self-esteem in the workplace. Furthermore, positive feedback from coworkers on newcomer behavior is beneficial to new hires in clarifying their role and evaluating their performance [Kohil and Jaworski, 1994]. By discussing policies and procedures with coworkers, the new hire has a better understanding about effective and expected behaviors. Behavioral feedback from colleagues offers the newcomer information that helps him or her avoid mistakes and reduce uncertainty [Kohil and Jaworski, 1994]. Since degrees of organization-based self-esteem increase or decrease in accordance with one’s acceptance or rejection from one’s work unit [Ferris, Brown, and Heller, 2009], recognition from coworkers might foster one’s self-esteem in work surroundings.
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